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A study of sibling relations: Does having an older sibling impact on an individual's goal orientated behaviour?

Zane Al Janabi

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ABSTRACT

Little is known about a sibling relationship within the psychology field. Family studies focus on dynamics such as birth-order, and family size, whilst neglecting individual's perspectives and sibling relations. The role of sibling relationships and goal-orientated behaviour were the focus of this study. Three male and four female younger siblings' attitudes were collected using semi-structured interviews. Participants were encouraged to talk about their own experience with having an older sibling whilst growing up. Four themes suggested having an older sibling motivates and deters goal-orientated behaviour. When an older sibling offers guidance and support towards a younger brother/sister, this acts as a motivator to maintain goal-orientated behaviour. Competition amongst siblings can lead to an individual developing an 'avoiding goal-orientated behaviour' due to feeling they may fail to achieve at the same standard as their sibling. Competition and high expectancy may also lead to developing 'goal-orientated' behaviour, as siblings may differentiate in the types of goals set, and direction in life, known as 'Sibling De-individualisation'. Future research should focus on same sex sibling influences and oldest sibling perspective to build on research. Having an older sibling does impact an individual's goal-orientated behaviour in a reinforcing or deterring manner depending on the relationship.

KEY WORDS:	ACHIEVEMENT MOTIVATION	SIBLING RELATIONS	GOAL-ORIENTATED BEHAVIOUR	SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCES	FAMILY PSYCHOLOGY
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Introduction

Goal-orientated Behaviour and Motivation

Goal setting is a process of creating an aim for an individual to strive for, which provides structure towards a desired outcome; these goals create an expected standard to achieve providing the individual with the motivation and objective to attain (Zimmerman and Schunk, 2008). Throughout literature, goal setting has thought to be an effective structure towards academic performance and a person's career path (Burton et al 2001; Locke and Latham, 2002). Typically, the type of goal affects the individual's motivation/drive to achieve; if the goal is set at an optimum 'reachable' level, motivation to strive for the goal will be increased. If the goal is too difficult and unrealistic for the individual then motivation will be lost, the individual will not achieve the desired outcome, so naturally it is important to set goals that are attainable (Locke and Latham, 2006). Motivation refers to a human's drive that is responsible for reinforcing or deterring an individual's involvement with planned actions (Erez, 2001). In this instance, motivation will be considered in the context of goal setting and achievement. Achievement being the completion of a goal often perceived by the individual as a feeling of accomplishment (Emmons, 2005). Achievement is subjective and the quality of it depends on the individual, as goals are typically individualistic, and the level of achievement depends on what achieving a particular goal means to the individual, as one person's goal may not be perceived as an accomplishment for another individual (Emmons 2005). Goal setting and achievement has been associated with academic success in previous literature. As individuals who set regular goals are thought to have a higher chance of being employed in a job they are satisfied with (Alivernini, 2016; Bell and Kozlowski, 2002) but achievement can also be in the form of non-academic and hobby based activities (Murtaugh, 1988) an example of which being winning a tournament in sports.

Many theories to demonstrate goal setting behaviour and motivation, typically exists in an educational/ occupational context, an example being David McClelland (1961) Human Motivation Theory. The theory sheds insight into the goal-orientated behaviour of employees and their motivation in the workplace. McClelland proposed three types of motivation, those of which being 'the need for affiliation', the need to be involved in a group or social function. 'The need for power' the need to control/ influence others. Finally, 'the need for achievement', this being the desire to set targets and to work towards achieving them. An individual is theorised to have a dominant motivator, amongst the three. Although this theory has been criticised for being difficult to measure the types of motivators, and deterministic for suggesting every individual exhibits one of the three motivators (Robbin et al, 2009), it does provide a starting point in understanding goal-setting behaviour and the motivation for achievement. Individuals who are more inclined to achieve are typically 'goal-orientated' and this is exhibited in the behaviour where individuals are more prone to set regular targets and strive proactively towards targets that are set (Yaghoubi, 2013). Contrastingly, individuals who display a low/ lack of goal-orientated behaviour may not choose to set goals recurrently, and are thought to be demonstrating an 'Avoiding Goal-Orientated behaviour' (Hart and Albarracín, 2009; Elliot and McGregor (2001). This type of behaviour has been implied to be due to an individual being afraid of failure, decreasing their likelihood of setting targets. Research

suggests individuals are more prone to being successful and live more satisfied lives if they demonstrate a high level of goal-orientated behaviour (Heyman, 2008). A study by Wang et al (2017) surveyed participants to collect attitudes about their likelihood of demonstrating goal-orientated behaviour and found that individuals who set goals regularly feel guided in a direction they wish to take in life, and achieving the desired results leads to an enhanced life satisfaction and well-being.

There is some confusion as to the nature/ nurture of goal-orientated behaviour, as it can be linked to an individual's personality, as one is thought to demonstrate an 'avoiding goal-orientated behaviour' or a 'goal-orientated behaviour' without alternating amongst the two throughout their lifespan (Brunstein, 2018). Other research such as the Human Motivation Theory (McClelland, 1961) suggest goal-orientated behaviour can be acquired over time in childhood or adulthood through environmental/ social factors (Elliot and Covington, 2001). This study will focus on the nurture element of goal-orientated behaviour and focus specifically on family psychology.

Family functions and goal-orientation

The question is whether factors of family life influence goal-orientated behaviour. A family environment is one of the basic trajectories towards the nurture argument within psychology, one which involves a child interacting with the environment and those closest to them, whether that be a mother, father, peers or sibling(s) (Ardelt, 2002). Black et al (2005) looked into goal behaviour, success and satisfaction within family contexts and concluded that the size of a family and the birth order of each individual has a positive and negative contribution towards the individual's academic success. An example being that those in larger families are less likely to achieve the goals they set, due to the family resources being shared amongst the number of family members. Similarly, parental expectations and parental involvement has been thought to influence an individual's likelihood to set regular goals to achieve, particularly in an academic sense (Yamamoto and Holloway, 2010). This may even be detrimental to a child's life satisfaction if they do not wish to strive towards these goals, and if the goals being set are unrealistically high for the child, resulting in them being unable to achieve the goal and losing the motivation throughout the process (Lee et al, 2012).

Studies that focus on only-children or the eldest sibling have demonstrated differences in goal-orientated behaviour compared to individuals who are younger siblings (Mellor, 1980). Eldest children are thought to be more independent and resourceful due to being the first child within a family and due to an increased level of attention from the parent, and a higher expectation to achieve goals and become successful (Mellor 1980; Rohrer, 2015). A prevalent area of family psychology is birth order, which highlights the differences amongst family members depending on their dynamic within the family. Alfred Adler (1927) first proposed the theory of birth order. Supportive research by Recchia et al, (2010) investigated the personality differences between first born and second born children using an observational study. They found that first-born children assume an authoritarian type personality assuming a 'teacher' role, and the younger child follows a 'learner' type role. The

younger child will learn to be more like their older sibling, with any dispute leading to competition. There has been many criticisms in the area of birth order however, as young children have been the focus of these studies, and adulthood behaviour is not explored (Plomin, 2011). Birth order has also theorised to lack an impact on behaviour, with a need for sibling-sibling relationships to be explored more in depth (Healey and Ellis, 2007; Dunkel et al, 2009).

A gap in the research for Sibling Studies

Predominant research towards the standpoint of goal-orientated behaviour and family psychology has often focused on the aforementioned dynamics of family functions, such as family size and birth order rather than the rapport of two siblings, thus leading to an insufficient grasp of what is known between the sibling-sibling dynamic in regards to goal-orientated behaviour and achievement (McHale, 2012). McHale (2012) conducted a meta-analysis to exemplify this, and found that amongst family psychology journals from 1990-2011 only a small minority focuses entirely on sibling-sibling functions, with greater emphasis on other family dynamics. With approximately 87% of western civilisation having grown up in the same environment as a biological sibling (King et al, 2010), it would be imperative to understand this type of relationship further, and its potential influence on behaviour. It can be suggested sibling-relations impact a difference in behaviour for those who have a good relationship with their sibling and those who do not. As Jambon (2018) conducted a longitudinal observation amongst 22 families and sets of siblings, and advocated that having an older sibling could influence interpersonal skills and develop a better level of empathy. There is little known whether a relationship between two siblings can have an influence on an individual's goal-orientated behaviour.

Non-identical sibling's share 50% of genes (Wade, 2015) and mainly grow up in the same environment. Therefore, it could be possible their relationship is an important influence on goal-orientated behaviour. Researchers such as Plomin and Dunn (1981) were amongst the first to carry out research exclusively on the sibling relations paradigm, hypothesising that an older sibling would influence a younger sibling's behaviour due to growing up in a *shared* environment. An older sibling was thought to act as a role model towards the younger sibling(s), helping them develop better social skills due to being at a more experienced stage in life. On the other hand, Plomin (2011) adapted his findings and found a difference in personalities amongst siblings. He found that siblings typically demonstrate contrastingly different personalities, despite sharing similar levels of intelligence and genetics. The findings do not explore goal-orientated behaviour but indicate a difference amongst siblings. The theory that siblings demonstrate contrasting traits have been coined 'Social De-Identification' by Whiteman (2007). This could be where each child follows a distinctive path from their siblings due to wanting to find their niche, and derive attention from their parents. Goodman (2015) criticised these studies and found that younger siblings often tended to follow in their older sibling's path in life, and pick the same subjects and attend the same colleges, which would indicate a similarity in personality. There is confusion amongst researchers as to whether older siblings have an influence on younger siblings or not. The similarities and differences

amongst siblings within these studies exemplifies the need to explore the sibling-sibling paradigm.

Likewise, the majority of research typically focuses on child participants. As mentioned earlier in reference to goal-orientated behaviour, models such as the Human Motivation Theory (McClelland, 1965) suggest behaviour could be influenced in childhood and in adulthood. Brody (2004) suggests the concept that sibling relations may have an impact in childhood, adulthood and throughout lifespan despite child participants being the focus in research, but this notion needs further exploration. Amongst the studies that look into sibling relations in adulthood, protective factors/ risk factors are the focus in relation to risk-behaviour. An example being Dirks et al (2015) who suggested that a good relationship between siblings in adolescence might act as a major risk factor or protective factor against drug use. Individuals are thought to be influenced should their rapport with their older sibling be strong, and they see their sibling as a supportive figure. If they hold a bad relationship, competition is more than likely to occur (Branje et al, 2004). A recent study to support these findings was by Canale et al (2017), who emphasises the need to focus on adult sibling influences. Attitudes of participants who had an older sibling with a gambling addiction were collected using a semi-structured interview. This was to find whether they were also likely to pick up a gambling addiction in adulthood. Participant's attitudes suggested that if they had a good relationship in adulthood they became influenced by their older sibling to also develop a gambling addiction, by going to casinos with them and being affiliated with their sibling's addiction. Participants attenuated from parent teachings and became more like their sibling, highlighting an importance of studying sibling relations.

Research Aims and Purpose

The prior study (Canale et al, 2017) was an example that used semi-structured interviews to explore an in depth account of sibling relationships. Previous literature tends to focus heavier on observations and longitudinal design (Plomin and Dunn, 2011; Jambon, 2018; Branje, 1997). The individual values derived from a sibling-sibling rapport are often overlooked in literature, with birth order and family size having more of a focus. Likewise, adult participants are rarely the focal point in sibling literature in comparison to child participants (Goodman 2015; Recchia et al, 2010).

The aim of this study is to investigate whether sibling factors impact goal-orientated behaviour. The second aim is to explore whether sibling-relations are an important contribution towards adulthood goal-orientated behaviour, as previous research in the area predominantly focuses on childhood attributes. The final aim is to focus on individual's perspective, and whether they consider their sibling has/had an impact on their goal-oriented behaviour, as previous research often neglects individual standpoints and focuses on observational methods.

Methodology

Design

The decision of using qualitative methods was to gather in-depth, rich data in the area of sibling relations. By using semi-structured interviews to gather attitudes from the individual, this study will differ from previous sibling research that typically lacks individual perspective and focuses on other factors of sibling dynamics such as family size and birth order (Black et al, 2005; Mellor, 1980). This method explores subjective experiences to understand sibling-relations, that of which may not be possible from other methods such as a survey (Gilgun, 2005). Austin (2014) describes qualitative design as a means of understanding the individual with reference to thought, feeling and emotions. As qualitative design is a method of gathering unique insight and interpretation from the participant (Corbin and Strauss, 2009). Majority of previous literature on sibling studies follows an observational design, with McHale (2012) signifying the need to focus less on this type, and more on a personal perspective.

Participants

Seven participants who met the criteria of having an older sibling and were aged between 18-25 were recruited. A small sample of participants is an optimum number for qualitative research, enabling the researcher to focus on deciphering themes amongst the participants, and allowing a rich in depth focus on behaviour, with a larger sample resulting in a difficulty of finding themes (Crouch and McKenzie, 2006). Participants were comprised of three males and four females. The sample age was 18-25 years of age to focus solely on young adults as the study was intended to focus on a different age group than previous literature, as children are typically the sample population investigated (Brody, 2004). The reason of restricting the age criteria from 18 to 25 as opposed to older participants was to collect attitudes from participants who may be more prone to demonstrating goal-orientated behaviour due to the important life decisions typically associated with this age group (Dunn, 1983). Many studies also stress the need to focus on the lived experiences of the younger sibling within a family as opposed to other individuals involved, such as parents, or the eldest sibling thus moving away from the birth order paradigm (Martirosyan, 2003; McHale, 2012).

The requirements of the study were featured on the participant information sheet (APPENDIX 2). This information sheet was used as the advertising tool in the Brooks building to collect participants.

Data Collection

Semi structured interviews were conducted in labs in Manchester Metropolitan University, were recorded on the researchers iPhone device, and typically lasted for 20-40 minutes. The interview schedule (APPENDIX 5) consisted of 15 questions that encouraged the individuals to discuss their experiences with having an older sibling, the goals they set, their sibling's goals and discussion about any similarities, differences or influences relating to their older sibling. As it is encouraged to ask questions to gain more depth in the topic area, open questions were devised to avoid the simple "yes" "no" response, as well as prompts being prepared for eight of the

fifteen questions enabling the participant to elaborate their answers further (Leech, 2002). McIntosh and Morse (2015) suggested that the interviewer should strive towards making the participant feel comfortable. This was derived by making sure the first question was broad, simple and set the pace for the rest of the interview. The last question was intended to be worded in a manner that enabled the participant to leave the interview in the mind-set they entered.

The participants were encouraged to elaborate their answer and were not interrupted in the instance they produce a response that may contribute to the studies research aims (Wildavsky and Hammer, 1993). With this in mind, the interviewer had the ability to press certain responses further if they were perceived as important (Brinkmann, 2013). The interviews were transcribed and the audio recordings were deleted once the transcripts were written.

Data Analysis

The method of using thematic analysis to decipher prevalent themes amongst participants was chosen. This method consists of analysing interview transcripts to draw up themes that relate back to the research question in a flexible manner (Nowell, 2017).

Braun and Clarke (2006) provided an in-depth account into formulating themes that reflect participant's responses during their interviews. Primarily the process involves familiarising oneself with the data in order to get an interpretation of the meaning behind what a participant says. The researcher then must select codes, which are broad features that relate back to the research question/ aims. The researcher must then search the transcripts for themes, which are meaningful patterns throughout the transcripts. These encompass the previously deciphered codes. The themes should then be reviewed to ensure they are purposeful towards the research and are recurrent throughout data. Finally, the themes should then be named and clearly defined.

Procedure

Once the ethical form was approved [Appendix 1] and participants were collected, the participants were asked to read the information sheet that described the purpose of the study, what they would be required to do, and the ethical considerations [Appendix 2]. The sheet informed the participant about their anonymity, and that their data was confidential. The sheet had external links and resources to counselling services should the participant have needed them. Those interested in taking part in the study were asked to sign a consent form, where they agreed to take part in the study [Appendix 3].

Interview rooms were reserved in MMU's Brooks building, to ensure the interview could take place with no distractions. Just before the interview commenced the interviewer established a rapport with the participant by talking beforehand with them. This was to ensure the participant felt comfortable, and to build up their confidence to produced in-depth responses during the interview (Gill et al, 2008). As

family experiences were the focus, in some cases this topic could potentially have caused distress, therefore the questions scheduled were worded in a sensitive manner and did not ask any intrusive, harmful questions [Appendix 5]. Following the interview participants were given a debrief sheet [Appendix 4]. This provided participants with a deadline of February 1st 2018 to withdraw their results, and to contact the researcher should they need to.

Discussion/ Analysis

Four themes were identified through the use of thematic analysis. These themes comprising of 'Social De-identification', this is where siblings may demonstrate separate personalities and behaviour. 'Sibling Competition', 'Support and Guidance' and an 'Increased Expectation'. Increased Expectation is in relation to what is expected of the participants to do in life by those closest to them.

Theme one: Sibling De-identification

Some participants mention that they try to be more like their older sibling, in instances where they see them as a role model and imitate their behaviour. Other times participants copy their older sibling after being told to 'follow in their footsteps' by family members. In these instances, participants admit to failing to be good/ as good as their sibling when trying to be more like them, and tend to try it and eventually quit. This is in reference to hobbies, sports and career paths.

"Like I'm not really into it [going to university] and it upsets you a bit then you think no that's my personality. So you realise stuff about your own personality." (Harper, lines 209-210)

Harper expresses that she has been told to act a certain way by others and to be more like her older sister, who she deems as more 'academic' and 'sociable' than her. These differences in personality have led to pressure to act a certain way, as she confesses that it "upsets" her. Although this failure to be like a sibling does harbour some positive outcomes, as by trying to be more like her sister, Harper has found out more about her own personality and her ambitions in life.

"She likes dancing and acting, and everything and I'm not like that and I only realised I'm not like that from trying, cause of her." (Harper, line 206)

A noteworthy subtheme presented throughout all interviews is that participants admit to adopting either an 'Intelligent/ Creative' goal-orientated behaviour or 'Sporty/ Athletic' behaviour with their older sibling adopting the opposing behaviour. This has impacted participant's goal orientated behaviour in terms of hobbies and career choices and can be supported by Plomin's (1981) findings that sibling have contrasting personalities. Locke and Latham's (2006) study sheds insight into this, as when participants would be more like their older sibling the goal was too difficult for them to achieve as they adopt a different personality, therefore they would set

separate goals they could achieve, this suggests having an older sibling may impact difference amongst goal-orientated behaviour.

“again he isn’t athletically inclined so I had to carry most of his gear. And had to do it for him but yeah but he’s always been the brainy brother” (Dalton, line 146)

“but it was always visible that he was way better at it [sports]!” (Elio, line 108)

Both Elio and Dalton demonstrate the recurring sense of the ‘Intelligent/ Creative’, ‘sporty/athletic’ counterparts that prevail throughout the interviews. Elio takes the role of the supporter because his brother is better at sports than he is, and Dalton lifts the heavy instruments when the brothers play music, but suggests his brother is more academic. These contrasting differences appear to affect the individual’s choices and goals in life and what they do in terms of hobbies/ careers:

“I don’t know, we are different so we don’t think about going to the same places, and universities. We don’t study similar things.” (Elio, lines 133-134)

These differences in personality, typically affected the goals the individuals were setting. The different niches within a family i.e. ‘Creativity/ Intelligence’ vs. ‘Athleticism’, make the goals the two siblings were striving for were completely unrelated. These findings differ from Goodman (2005) who suggests participants take the same subjects in college.

“my parents always said funnily that they bought us in different shops and bought me in creativity shop and bought my brother in a sports shop. He would likely not be friends with me if he wasn’t my brother.” (Elio, lines 88-89).

“I think the differences are the reason we don’t really get on, and we’re not really that close.” (Jorgi, line 87).

Sometimes these differences affected the sibling’s rapport with each other and made them grow distance or unable to relate to each other’s direction in life. It is important to consider whether the individual may have separate goals and niches due to having completely separate personalities, or if it could be that the individual tries to purposely pursue different goals from their sibling to derive uniqueness.

“I don’t wanna do what they do. In a sense it still has an influence cause even though you’re different they’ve still had an effect on you both ways.” (Jorgi, lines 172, 174)

A sibling-sibling relationship may be influential on an individual’s goal-orientated behaviour regardless of if it is a good or bad relationship. If the relationship is good,

in instances such as Harper she will likely copy behaviour, but in instances like Jorgi he does not get along with his sister so purposely tries to differ from her behaviour.

These findings differ from Plomin's (2001) theory that siblings share similar intelligence despite having different personalities, as participants demonstrate the idea that one sibling assumes the role as the 'creative/intelligent' child who is more academic, and one is 'athletic' who is more motivated to set social, sports-related goals. This builds on Whiteman (2007) research that siblings strive to find their niche within a family. In this case it is demonstrated in two forms; one where participants try to be like their sibling but do not achieve at their standard and develop an 'avoiding goal-orientated behaviour' (Hart and Albarracín, 2009), and one outcome where participants try to set unique goals contrasting to what their sibling sets.

"he wants to try something like "oh I might travel" it's like it's all never followed through. I try to be completely different to that." (Casey, lines 62-63).

Theme two: Sibling competition

Sibling competition is a theme that often came up when discussing motivation to achieve a goal. Participants often demonstrated a desire to achieve higher than their sibling, and this impacted their motivation to set higher goals than their sibling.

"we are very competitive me and my brothers. Whatever they've done like I have always had to do it and do it better. Like for my GCSE's" (Anna, lines 49-50),

"I had to do better and rub it in their faces like uni, college. So far I'm winning." (Anna, line 51).

Anna has been reinforced by her older brother's grades to work harder in school to achieve higher academically. This is an indication that older siblings can increase a younger sibling's motivation to succeed, however if the sibling is not competitive with their sibling they may lose achievement motivation.

"I always wanted to have that as well, so it's not purely the physical bit, but have better communication skills and confidence." (Elio, lines 150 151)

When participants such as Elio are not competitive to achieve the same goals as their sibling their motivation decreases. This links to the theme Social De-identification, as it leads to deterred motivation.

"You think; ooh they're the 'golden child' and you aren't, so you could go the other way and become the 'black sheep'" (Harper, line 51),

Harper describes the older sibling who is achieving as more successful, referred to as the 'golden child'. These attitudes may give insight into why a younger sibling may exhibit an 'Avoiding goal-orientated behaviour' (Hart and Albarracín, 2009). This fear of failure may stem from competition amongst siblings. If an individual feels like their older sibling is better at something than them, they may feel like they will be more prone to failure and adopt this avoiding behaviour. In this instance Harper feels like if her sister is better than her, she could become more withdrawn as she coins being a "black sheep".

"if my grades were bad, I probably wouldn't show her." (Jorgi, line 116),

Sibling competition has shown to have a large impact on an individual's motivation to set goals. Individuals feel satisfied if they achieve this, such as Anna and unsatisfied if they do not, such as Jorgi. Building on the findings of Branje et al (2004), a bad rapport between siblings can lead to competition. This may correspond in terms of achievement motivation, where siblings who get along are demonstrating 'friendly competition' that does not deter motivation, compared to a poor rapport that does. These attitudes of sibling competition differ from the study by Recchia et al (2010), as it was implied that sibling competition occurs when the younger child does *not* follow the direction of the older sibling, in this instance competition occurs when siblings strive in the same direction in life.

Theme three: Support and guidance

The idea that receiving support from an older sibling motivates goal-orientated behaviour depended on the participant's relationship with their sibling. Some participants felt like having an older sibling helped them achieve a goal through advice. Other individuals felt that having a sibling made no difference to their path of achieving a goal and it was an independent process.

"yeah cause they've been through it, you can ask for advice and look and see how they done it and learn from their mistakes." (Layla, lines 101-102)

"I can get advice, whereas if you don't have an older sibling you might only have your parents to look for and sometimes you can't ask them cause it might be a situation where you can't discuss with them" (Harper, lines 154-156)

"But in a general sense of course it is way easier to have a brother, way more comfortable just cos of the things that were difficult for him as a first-born child, was way easier for me." (Elio, lines 122-124).

Layla suggests that having an older sibling helps reinforce her likelihood to achieve the goals she sets, as her older brothers help her to succeed. In some cases, such

as picking appropriate topics in college, Layla feels like because they are older they have more experience. She feels that she can ask for advice due to them being more experienced in this domain, and to make sure to “learn from their mistakes”. With Elio supporting the claim that being a first born is difficult because of this. Harper mentions that she can confront her siblings in topics that she could not tell her parents, an example being academia. This may be beneficial as an older sibling may have a more recent experience with education, than a parent would and can provide substantial advice.

“I think they are more of a resource to achieve a goal rather than the reason” (Layla, line 80).

In terms of goal-orientated behaviour, Layla thinks that having an older sibling offering advice is not a *reason* to set goals but rather acts as supportive factor to help *maintain* goal-orientated behaviour, due to an older sibling being perceived as knowledgeable.

“They are the whole other person and the impact they have on you, has as much impact as you want it to have.” (Jorgi, line 53),

In instances where individuals have less of a close bond, they may not choose to take the advice from their sibling, meaning this may not have an impact on goal-orientated behaviour compared to a theme such as competition. In instances where a relationship is good, a subtheme where participants can ‘learn from their older sibling’s mistakes’ exists.

“obviously my brother came to university in Manchester and here I am. I’m originally from Barnsley. So it kinda follows on his reference to Manchester being a nice place made me want to come” (Dalton, lines 162-164),

This links to what Goodman (2005) found, as a younger siblings may tend to go to the same college as their older sibling, but in many cases, unlike Goodman’s findings siblings do not choose the same courses as their older sibling. They tend to take their siblings’ advice about the university/college but still continue to find their unique difference within the family. Once again, in this instance a good rapport is stressed, supporting the findings of Canale (2009), as a good rapport can relate to a person seeing their older sibling as a role model.

Theme four: Increased Expectation

The theme ‘Increased Expectation’ refers to an individual’s pressure to achieve at a higher standard due to the high expectations set by others. The expectation and pressure to succeed has typically been related to parental influences in previous literature, but attitudes suggested siblings had some role in the pressure to succeed.

“when you see your sister go down the academic route you think it’s doable.” (Jorgi, line 88),

“but if you think they can do it I can do it.” (Harper, line 50),

The older sibling’s actions act as a motivator to setting goals in education. This supports Locke and Latham’s (2006) theory of motivation towards goal setting and achievement. As individual’s naturally set goals that they perceive as attainable. The sibling relations in this instance has allowed the younger sibling to acknowledge going to university and furthering one’s education as an attainable goal to set, due to their older sibling previously achieving this. If the participant did not have an older sibling, they may have less motivation to go to university, and not think it is a reasonable goal to set.

“well yeah cos you’re doing everything for the first time and there’s nobody doing it in front of you first. You’re going high school first. You’re going out drinking with friends first” (Harper, line 160-162)

Harper highlights what she believes to be the difference between goal-orientated behaviour for an older and a younger sibling. For an older sibling, they have to decide what to strive for in life with no expectations previously set by a sibling.

“You have to put responsibility on the parent, cause your older sibling is just you a couple years ahead.” (Harper, lines 179-180),

As mentioned earlier, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) investigated parental influences and expectations towards their child. This may still be relational between siblings as a parent may urge the child to be more like their older sibling.

“but if you see your sibling doing well like going to university. I think you’ll be more likely to, but I didn’t so I just went straight to work.” (Harper, line 200)

“I dunno cause I used to be told Chris didn’t behave like this, nick didn’t behave like this and I just thought right I’m not nick or Chris so I’m not gonna behave like them” (Anna, lines 53-54)

Despite having an increased expectancy to do certain things in life, and set higher goals than expected, Anna and Harper defy to be more like their brother or sister. So despite the impact an older sibling may have on an individual, they might choose to completely differ and not follow in the older siblings’ footsteps. To build on the study by Lee et al, (2012) who suggests individuals lose motivation to act a certain way

when their parents impose goals to achieve, these attitudes may imply the same thing occurs between siblings.

“she has done much more in life than me so I look up to that, whether that be socially, career wise or uni wise, cause she’s done it I feel like I can do it.” (Casey, lines 22-23)

The modality of setting the bar high may not only be the case for academia, but also social life as well, as mentioned by Casey. If the sibling looks up to their older sibling for having a large social life, they may want to be more like that.

Final Discussion

As an older sibling is ahead of the younger sibling in life, the present themes help emphasise the influences that motivate a younger sibling to work harder and strive for achievement. The older sibling acts as a reference point. If the older sibling has done something particularly unique, including their career path or hobbies, the younger sibling may notice this and try to pursue another path, linking to Whiteman (2007) Social De-Identification theory. In terms of academia a younger sibling will notice the accomplishments the older sibling has set and attempt to achieve higher, there are increased expectations that may not always be able to reach impacting motivation. A criticism of this study is that gender differences are not considered; therefore future research should look into same sex sibling influences as this was briefly mentioned by Layla and Harper,

“They probably made less of an influence especially me being an only girl” (Layla, line 155).

Likewise, older sibling perspectives should be explored in order to understand themes such as Sibling Competition better. Nonetheless, these findings are valuable as they give an insight into how having an older sibling can enhance/ decrease the motivation of an individual to aspire for higher goals and achieve more than if they were an only child.

“in terms of a career I would say I’m definitely going down a route that is on a higher level compared to if I didn’t have an older brother” (Dalton, line 87).

Reflexive Analysis

Being one of six siblings in a family where our hobbies and careers were considerably different drawn me to this field of research. We did not share many similarities in our direction in life whether that is in terms of sports, jobs or educational paths. I was one of the youngest children, so I felt like I had others to look up to and times where I could not ask a parent for advice my siblings would be

there to provide me with support. So they were an integral part of me and despite having contrasting differences, we have a very good relationship.

The fact that the participants also grew up in families where they were not the eldest sibling made me feel like I could mostly relate to what they were stating in their interviews. The notion of “Creativity/ Intelligence” and “Sporty/ Athleticism” subthemes that occurred amongst sibling differences, felt true to the differences that occur within my household, and this study has broadened my understanding and outlook of being a member of six siblings.

The use of the semi-structured questions were to not delve too deep into asking about family functions that direct previous family scholarly articles, such as family size, birth order and parental factors. Of course, these aspects of discussion could not be completely avoided but surprisingly participants responded well to the questions and focused predominately on sibling relations.

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